

IN THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) A method of searching for data, the method comprising the steps of:

accepting a question from a client;

sending the question through a defined Application Program Interface to a plurality of search services, wherein each search service within the plurality of search services accepts the question through the defined Application Program Interface that is defined to be the same Application Program Interface for all of the search services within the plurality of search services;

receiving a plurality of results from one or more of the search services, wherein each of the one or more of the search services provides results through the defined Application Program Interface;

receiving, from each of the one or more of the search services, a specification of wherein each of the results has an associated rank value for each result within the plurality of results, the specification of the associated rank value having been that is assigned by the respective search service from which the result is received; and

adjusting the specification of the associated rank value of at least one result based upon a weight for the search service that assigned the associated specification of the rank value, wherein the weight is assigned by at least one of a client specification and a default weighting specification.

2. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of sending, through the defined Application Programming Interface and in conjunction with the question, at least one user preference to the plurality of search services.

3. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of receiving, through the defined Application program interface, a specification of a maximum rank value possible from the each respective search service within the one or

more of the search services, wherein the associated specification of the rank value is relative to the maximum rank value possible from the respective search service.

4. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising the step of sending a subset of the results to the client, the subset being selected in dependence upon the associated ranks specification of the rank values of the results after the adjusting step and upon a user specified preference for a number of results to receive.

5. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, wherein the receiving step comprises storing the results in a result pool, and the method further comprises ~~the step of:~~

sending, through the defined Application Program Interface and in conjunction with the question, a response timeout value; and

retrieving, after a time period corresponding to the response timeout value elapses, the results from the result pool after a predetermined time.

6. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 1, further comprising maintaining a set of user defined preferences, wherein the user defined preferences comprise the client specification, and wherein the client specification comprises a user specified weight for at least one search service within the one or more search services, and

wherein the weight assigned by the client specification overrides the weight assigned by the default weighting specification.

7 - 8. (Cancelled)

9. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 8~~1~~, wherein the question is a natural language question, the method further comprising the step of sending, through the defined Application Program Interface, a parsed representation of the natural language question to the search services, wherein the parsed representation consists of terms

within the natural language query along with metadata for the terms within the natural language query.

10. (Currently Amended) The method of claim 9, wherein the step of sending a parsed representation includes the sub-steps of:

generating grammatical information describing the natural language question, wherein the grammatical information comprises at least one of identification of nouns in the natural language question, identification of verbs in the natural language question and identification of at least one of adjectives and adverbs in the natural language question; and

providing the grammatical information to at least one of the search services.

11. (Currently Amended) A system of searching for data, the system comprising:

a parser, operating on at least one computer system, for accepting a question from a client;

a dispatcher, operating on the at least one computer system, for sending the question through a defined Application Program Interface to a plurality of search services, wherein each search service within the plurality of search services accepts the question through the defined Application Program Interface that is defined to be the same Application Program Interface for all of the search services within the plurality of search services;

a receiver, operating on the at least one computer system, for receiving a plurality of results from one or more of the search services, wherein each of the one or more of the search services provides results through the defined Application Program Interface, the receiver further for receiving, from each of the one or more of the search services, a specification of wherein each of the results has an associated rank value for each result within the plurality of results, the specification of the associated rank value having been that is assigned by the respective search service from which the result is received; and

a normalizer, operating on the at least one computer system, for adjusting the associated specification of the rank value of at least one result based upon a weight for the search service that assigned the associated specification of the rank value, wherein the weight is assigned by at least one of a client specification and a default weighting specification; and

a result generator for sending at least part of the plurality of results to the client.

12. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 11, ~~further comprising a~~ wherein the result generator is further adapted for sending a subset of the results to the client, the subset being selected in dependence upon the associated ranks specification of the rank values of the results after the adjusting by the normalizer and upon a user specified preference for a number of results to receive.

13. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 11, wherein the receiver further comprises a result pool for storing the results, the dispatcher is further for sending, through the defined Application Program Interface and in conjunction with the question, a response timeout value; and the normalizer further retrieves, after a time period corresponding to the response timeout value elapses, the results from the result pool after a predetermined time.

14. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 11, the dispatcher further for maintaining a set of user defined preferences, wherein the user defined preferences comprise the client specification, and wherein the client specification comprises a user specified weight for at least one search service within the one or more search services, and

wherein the weight is assigned by the client specification overrides the weight assigned by the default weighting specification.

15. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 11, wherein question is a natural language question, wherein the dispatcher is further for sending, through the defined Application Program Interface, a parsed representation of the natural language question to the search services, wherein the parsed representation consists of terms within the natural language query along with metadata for the terms within the natural language query.

16. (Currently Amended) The system of claim 15,
wherein the parser further generates grammatical information describing the natural language question, wherein the grammatical information comprises at least one of identification of nouns in the natural language question, identification of verbs in the natural language question and identification of at least one of adjectives and adverbs in the natural language question, and
the dispatcher provides the grammatical information to at least one of the search services.

17. (Currently Amended) A computer readable medium including tangibly encoded with computer instructions for searching for data, the computer instructions comprising instructions for:
accepting a question from a client;
sending the question through a defined Application Program Interface to a plurality of search services, wherein each search service within the plurality of search services accepts the question through the defined Application Program Interface that is defined to be the same Application Program Interface for all of the search services within the plurality of search services;
receiving a plurality of results from one or more of the search services, wherein each of the one or more of the search services provides results through the defined Application Program Interface;

receiving, from each of the one or more of the search services, a specification of wherein each of the results has an associated rank value for each result within the plurality of results, the specification of the associated rank value having been that is assigned by the respective search service from which the result is received; and
adjusting the associated specification of the rank value of at least one result based upon a weight for the search service that assigned the associated specification of the rank value, wherein the weight is assigned by at least one of a client specification and a default weighting specification.

18. (Currently Amended) The computer readable medium of claim 17, further comprising instructions for sending a subset of the results to the client, the subset being selected in dependence upon the associated ranks specification of the rank values of the results after the adjusting and upon a user specified preference for a number of results to receive.

19. (Currently Amended) The computer readable medium of claim 17, wherein the instructions for receiving comprises instructions for storing the results in a result pool and the computer readable medium further comprises instructions for:
sending, through the defined Application Program Interface and in conjunction with the question, a response timeout value; and
retrieving, after a time period corresponding to the response timeout value elapses, the results from the result pool after a predetermined time.

20. (Currently Amended) The computer readable medium of claim 17, further comprising instructions for maintaining a set of user defined preferences, wherein the user defined preferences comprise the client specification, and wherein the client specification comprises a user specified weight for at least one search service within the one or more search services, and

wherein the weight assigned by the client specification overrides the weight assigned by the default weighting specification.

21. (Currently Amended) The computer readable medium of claim 17, wherein the question is a natural language question, the computer instructions further comprising instructions for sending, through the defined Application Program Interface, a parsed representation of the question to the search services, wherein the parsed representation consists of terms within the natural language query along with metadata for the terms within the natural language query.

22. (Currently Amended) The computer readable medium of claim 21, wherein the instructions for sending a parsed representation include instructions for:

generating grammatical information describing the natural language question, wherein the grammatical information comprises at least one of identification of nouns in the natural language question, identification of verbs in the natural language question and identification of at least one of adjectives and adverbs in the natural language question; and

providing the grammatical information to at least one of the search services.

23. (New) The method of claim 2, wherein the at least one user preference comprises at least one of a timeout, and a maximum result size, the method further comprising:

receiving at one of the one or more search services, through the defined Application Program Interface, the question and the at least one user preference;

determining, at the one of the one or more search services, at least one result within the plurality of results based upon the question and the at least one user preference; and

sending from the one of the one or more search services the at least one result in accordance with the at least one user preference.

24. (New) The method of claim 10, wherein the grammatical information comprises an identification of nouns in the natural language question, an identification of verbs in the natural language question and an identification of at least one of adjectives and adverbs in the natural language question, the method further comprising:

- receiving at one of the one or more search services, through the defined Application Program Interface, the grammatical information;
- evaluating, at the one of the one or more search services, the natural language question by assigning high weight to nouns, medium weight to verbs and low weight to adjectives and adverbs
- determining, at the one of the one or more search services, at least one result within the plurality of results based upon the evaluating the natural language query; and
- sending from the one of the one or more search services the at least one result in accordance with the at least one user preference.